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## THE EDITOR'S DIARY.

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### The Undertaker at Close Range.

WE have received the following interesting and illuminating communication from Brookville, Indiana:

"SIR,—Being closely associated at the present time with two undertakers, my husband and my brother-in-law, and by actual count numbering among my acquaintances no less than a dozen others, I cannot refrain from making some reply to your article entitled 'The Proper Conduct of Funerals.' We cannot, it is true, deny the gravity of death, and if, as you say, 'dying is one of the most popular things we can do,' do you not even then diminish our last rays of glory on earth by the glaring publicity of the undertaker? To our mind the dead, the friends, the funeral, the—everything must be completely overshadowed by that monstrosity in human shape and garb—the undertaker.

"But to enlighten the unenlightened. 'How would it seem to be an undertaker?' Not one bit different than to be any other man in the every-day walks of life—a man, just as other men, oftentimes doing without compensation the duty which lies nearest him. Unwittingly, perhaps, the remarks are most unjust to a respected and respectable profession. The man of whom you speak is not 'notoriously considerate' and 'ostentatiously patient' with those with whom he has to deal. He is in all cases both considerate and patient, not on account of 'business,' but because of the manhood in him. Sometimes, however, he may be so human as to find that patience has ceased to be a virtue.

"'Physically he conveys the impression of unhealthiness.' Verily your knowledge must be very limited. In my circle of acquaintances the majority give evidence of as healthy internal organs as one could wish for. I believe the practice of the profession does sometimes seriously affect the health. I know personally of three such cases, but to give as a cause 'the constant mournful mien' can only awaken a feeling of indignation in those who realize the falsity of the statement. When you consider that in all probability poisonous gases arise from all dead bodies; the various diseases with which he must come in contact; that he must go to all sorts and conditions of men; that he must be willing to handle bodies in conditions which most people would

never dream of, and a hundred other things which only an undertaker of experience could tell you of—it is a matter far too serious to be treated lightly.

“Judging from the members of my own family, undertakers quite frequently enjoy a game of tennis, as well as such sports as hunting, fishing, etc., and more than once have I seen them at the country club, a dance or the theatre, the gayest of the gay, and yet retaining the ‘custom of the élite.’

“Notwithstanding the fact that my husband’s eyelids do sometimes droop in church (how like most men that is), I feel sure that his comprehension is in no way blunted, but rather awakened to the desirability of saving his soul. He is a member of the official Board of the Methodist Church in this city and attends church regularly.

“Of the men in this profession of whom I speak nearly all are allied with some church, and the greater number of them are active church-workers.

“No, he does not throughout meals or at any other time ‘preserve his official demeanor.’ He enjoys home and the baby. Yes, he even has children; sometimes as many as six and sometimes, not being blessed with one of his own, he adopts one.

“That they ‘unconsciously come to regard themselves as apart from other men—and so perhaps they are, as a sexton is or a hangman’—is most unjust to men engaged in a harmless and necessary business. Both my husband and myself are alumni of one of the leading universities of the Middle West. He was formerly employed in a bank, and in becoming an undertaker neither he nor his family were ostracized from the society to which they had been born and raised, neither at home nor abroad. We still retain the standing which is by birth, manners and education ours.

“As to why ‘anybody could be induced to make a business or profession of the handling of corpses’ there may be various reasons. I believe the majority of undertakers are influenced by circumstance rather than choice. In two instances within my knowledge has the business descended from father to son. In one instance the profession was selected from choice—by a man as far from the one portrayed in your article as the North is from the South.

“As to the little book entitled ‘The Funeral,’ when you more thoroughly understand the subject you may realize whose criticism it is that suggests ‘flippancy hardly becoming the treatment of a subject so shrouded in solemnity.’

“I am, sir, etc.,

“HALLIE HARRELL SHOWALTER.”